



NEWS

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Kempthorne: Close Coordination Vital for Defense Department Build-up in U.S. Territory of Guam

HAGÅTÑA, Guam – The opportunities and challenges posed by the redeployment of 8,000 U.S. Marines and 9,000 military dependents to this island as part of a force realignment in the Asian-Pacific region was the primary focus of discussion during Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne's official visit here.

Kempthorne held talks with Guam Gov. Felix Camacho, Lt. Gov. Michael Cruz, members of the Guam Legislature, Navy and Air Force representatives and the Guam Civilian-Military Task Force during two-days of meetings in this strategically important U.S. territory in the Western Pacific.

"I cannot overstate how important it is for the Department of the Interior to work in close coordination with the Department of Defense and the Government of Guam to ensure that this transfer is accomplished as seamlessly as possible," Kempthorne said. "While Guam will derive great economic benefits from the military build-up, the government will need assistance in preparing the territory's infrastructure for the influx of so many thousands of people over a relatively short time. The Interior Department stands ready to help."

Kempthorne, whose department has overall responsibility for federal policy in the U.S. island territories, was accompanied by BJ Penn, Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Installations and Environment; Donald Schregardus, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Environment; and David Cohen, Interior's Deputy Assistant Secretary for Insular Affairs.

In addition to the redeployment of U.S. Marines and their dependents from Okinawa, the Defense Department will be moving other Navy, Air Force and Army units to Guam over the next seven years as part of a major regional realignment. The moves could add an additional 30,000 people to the island's population of about 170,000.

The build-up will infuse an estimated \$10.5 billion for new construction, rehabilitation and relocation projects in the territory over the next seven years. The work includes housing, naval and air base facility expansion, road and utility work. The Japanese

government is contributing about \$6 billion of the total cost and the U.S. Government about \$4 billion. The Government of Guam is planning to improve seaport and utility services and significantly expand its labor force to accommodate the build-up.

In addition to meeting government and private sector leaders, Kempthorne was briefed at the principal military bases. On Thursday, he visited the naval base for discussions with Captain Janice Wynn, Chief of Staff, Commander, Naval Forces Marianas. On Friday, he visited Anderson Air Force Base for talks with Brigadier General Doug Owens, wing commander. Both bases will play key roles in the Marine redeployment. During both visits, Kempthorne thanked military personnel for their service.

Kempthorne, Assistant Secretary Penn and Gov. Camacho placed a wreath at War in the Pacific National Historic Park, which honors the thousands of Americans and local Chamorros who died during the World War II occupation and liberation of Guam, as well as the citizens of Guam who suffered during the occupation. Kempthorne also attended the interment of Iosiwo Uruo, a U.S. Army soldier from Guam who was recently killed in action while serving in Iraq.

The Secretary visited Ritidian Point National Wildlife Refuge for a first-hand look at efforts by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Geological Survey to eradicate the invasive brown tree snake. Native to Southeast Asia, the species has devastated the native bird populations of Guam, and could spread to other sensitive ecosystems in the Pacific. Both agencies are overseen by the Department of the Interior.

Guam was the second stop of Kempthorne's visit to U.S.-affiliated Pacific communities. He earlier visited the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and will next visit the freely associated states of Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia and the Marshall Islands, concluding his official visits in American Samoa.

As Secretary of the Interior, Kempthorne is responsible for overall coordination of federal policy for the U.S. insular areas, advocating for the islands within the Federal Government, overseeing the distribution of appropriated funds for island territories, and administering U.S. financial assistance for the freely associated states.

Guam, a U.S. territory since 1898, is the largest (212 square miles) and southern most island of the Marianas Archipelago as well as the largest island in the Western Pacific, and serves as the telecommunications and air/sea transportation hub of the region.

Located 1,500 miles east of Manila and 1,500 miles south-southeast of Tokyo, Guam provides flexibility of movement for forward-deployed U.S. forces in the region. About 3,700 miles west-southwest of Honolulu, Guam's Apra Harbor is the largest deepwater port between Hawaii and Manila.